



Testimony in Support of HB 6567

Submitted by Bryce Chinault, Director of External Affairs

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Higher Education and Employment Advancement committee in **support of [HB 6567: An Act Requiring Public Institutions of Higher Education to Establish a Policy Regarding Freedom of Expression on Campus](#)**. My name is Bryce Chinault, and I am the Director of External Affairs for Yankee Institute, a non-profit public policy organization in Hartford dedicated to empowering Connecticut residents to forge a better future for themselves and their families.

Yankee Institute **supports HB 6567** because freedom of speech is a right for all Americans under the [First Amendment](#) of the U.S. Constitution. The ability to [engage](#) with ideas by both expressing and listening to them at universities is imperative for our society's growth and advancement.

From the founding of Plato's [Academy](#) in ancient Greece where the likes of Aristotle tried to answer what it meant to live a good life; to the University of Tokyo where [Kunie Miyaji](#) became a pioneering female physician; or the University of Al-Karaouine in Morocco where [Maimonades](#) thought through the existence of good and evil; to our very own University of Connecticut, free expression and robust debate of challenging ideas have allowed us to grow and flourish.

Although the modern U.S. academy is still a place to both challenge and be challenged by ideas, the ubiquitous calls to regulate speech on campus is stunting the growth of young minds. Limiting the freedom to speak soon becomes tantamount to curtailing the freedom to think.

One of the most common concerns expressed by institutions about having a speaker or topic discussed on campus is the threat of physical violence and altercations. Words, however, *do not equal violence*. If someone decides to partake in physical violence against someone else based upon words and ideas they abhor, the mandate for society is not to stymie the debate but to enforce bodily autonomy and both prevent and prosecute those who commit the violence.

If we are to accept that violence is a reasonable response to speech, justifying campus regulation, then we must also accept that the fatwa that took an eye and nearly the life of novelist [Salman Rushdie](#) is an acceptable form of maintaining social order. That is the logical result of the “words are violence” mantra and universities, of all places, should reject that outright.

Another justification for further regulation of speech is that certain ideas and thoughts are so controversial that they should not be allowed to happen. But who should decide what is “controversial” or “problematic” language?

- Was, for instance, the Catholic Church right to arrest [Galileo Galilei](#)? Should students at [UC-Berkeley](#) have been banned from campus for protesting the Vietnam War? Was it right for [Baruch Spinoza](#)’s life to be threatened for his philosophy? Should [Dorothy Day](#) have been arrested because she advocated for women to have the right to vote? Is it a good idea to bring back witch trials in Connecticut?

This list could go on forever, but the obvious answer to all the above is and ought to be an emphatic NO. HB 6567 will help society, in a small way, become less likely to take those same actions in the future.

When we suppress speech we are not only infringing upon the rights of the speaker, but as [Christopher Hitchens](#) reminded us, we are also robbing others of the opportunity to hear an idea. It is, after all, the mark of an educated mind to entertain a thought without accepting it. Universities are, first and foremost, a place to learn, and we cannot reach the apex of our academic capabilities without being constantly challenged by new ideas. Attacks on free speech are prompting students to [self-censor](#), which we know from polling of students of all backgrounds. Creating an environment on campus that stymies mindful growth is actively harming today’s students.

Universities that have created effective free speech policies include the [University of Chicago](#), [Kansas State University](#), and [Purdue University](#). The

Foundation for Individual Rights in Education also provides detailed [information](#) on this topic for those committed to protecting First Amendment rights on campus, and they also provide examples of related [legislation](#) from across the country.

Respectfully submitted,

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